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The Original First Draught of the Mecklenburg Declaration

RECENTLY BROUGHT TO LIGHT

A Copy in the Possession of the North Carolina Historical Commission

The following is a copy of the first draught of the Mecklenburg Declaration of May 20th, written by Col. John McKnitt Alexander. The original document was in the keeping of Gov. David L. Swain, when he was President of the University of North Carolina, and he had it carefully copied for the historian, George Bancroft, which copy W. H. Hoyt reproduced in his excellent work: "The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence," from which this is now taken. The existence of this document has not been known in North Carolina until recently.

The original document in the hand writing of John McKnitt Alexander was found after his death in 1817 by his son and deposited with Gov. Swain; since Gov. Swain's death it has been misplaced. This is the first publication of it in North Carolina, and it is virtually an unknown paper.

1775.

On the 19th May 1775 Pursuant to the Order of Col. Adam Alexander to each Captain of Militia in his regiment of Mecklenburg County, to elect nominate and appoint 2 persons of their Militia company, cloathed with ample powers to devise ways&means to extricate themselves and ward off the dreadfull impending storm bursting on them by the British Nation &&

Therefore on sd. 19th May the sd. Committee met in Charlotte Town (2 men from each company) Vested with all powers these their constituents had or conceived they had &&&

After a short conference about their suffering brethren besieged and suffering every hardship in Boston and the American Blood running in Lexington && the Electrical fire flew into every breast and to preserve order choose Abraham Alex Esquire chairman & J. McK. A. Secretary. After a few Hour free discussion in order to give relief to suffering America and protect our Just & natural right

- 1st. We (the County) by a *Solemn* and *awfull* vote, *Dissolved* our allegiance to King George & the British Nation.
- 2d. Declared our selves a free & independent people, having a *right* and *capable* to govern ourselves (as a part of North Carolina).
- 3d. In order to have laws as a rule of life—for our future Government We formed a Code of laws, by adopting our former wholesome laws.
- 4th. And as there was then no officers civil or Millitary in our County

We *Decreed* that every Militia officer in sd. county should hold and occupy his former commission and Grade

And that every member present, of this Committee shall henceforth (torn) as a Justice of the Peace (in the) Character of a Committee M

The original is torn here at all the blanks.

hear and determine all Controversies agreeable to sd. laws— peace
 Union & harmony in sd. County—to use every
 spread the Electrical fire of freedom
 among ourselves & n

5th. && many laws & ordinances were then made after sitting up in the Court house all night—neither

After reading and maturing every paragraph they were all passed Nem-Con about 12 O'clock May 20 180 1775.

But in a few days (after cooling) a considerable part of sd. Committee Men convened and employed Capt James Jack (of Charlotte) to go express to Congress (then in Philadelphia) with a Copy of all sd. resolutions and laws & a letter to our 3 members there, Richd. Caswell, Wm. Hooper & Joseph Hughes in order to get Congress to sanction or *approve* them &&&&

Capt Jack returned with a long, full, complasent letter from sd. 3 members, recommending our *zeal perseverance order & forbearance* &**—(We were premature) Congress never had our sd. laws on their table for discussion, though sd. Copy was left with them by Capt. Jack

N. B. about 1787 Doctor Hugh Williamson (then of New York; but formerly was member of Congress from this

State) applied

The original above by Col. Wm. Polk, who was then compiling a
is here in order to prove that the American people
torn in the Revolution and that Congress were *com*

N. B. allowing the 19th May to be a *rash Act*

The original effects in binding all the middle & west
is here firm whigs— no torys but
torn not fully represented in the first

There is a second page about matters in Charlotte in the fall of 1780, &c., and he further wrote:

These severe just—tho arbitrary measures were the cause of peace (torn) the County untill the fall of 1777 when our first (torn) ssembly met in Newbern in the State of North Carolina and confirmed (torn) proved nearly all that was done. New State commissions then issued & (torn) fficers as they yet do—see the laws of sd. session of 1777

(torn) & foregoing extracted from the old minutes &&

By J. McK. Alexander

There is then some addition, ending——

And soon afterwards we smelt and felt the Blood & carnage of Lexington which raised all the passions into fury and revenge which was the immediate cause of adjuring great britain on May 19 48 1775. April 19 1775 wa the battle of Lexington.

The above first draught of the Mecklenburg Declaration written in 1800 by Col Alexander was found after his death along with a completed draught in another handwriting, which was the same as the copy sent to General Davie by Col Alexander, and to which was attached the following certificate:

It may be worthy of notice here to observe that the foregoing statement, though fundamentally correct, yet may not literally correspond with the original record of the transactions of said delegation and court of enquiry, as all those records and papers were burnt with the house on April 6th, 1800; but previous to that time of 1800, a full copy of said records, at the request of Doctor Hugh Williamson, then of New York, but formerly a representative in Congress from this State, was forwarded to him by Col Wm Polk, in order that those early transactions might fill their proper place in a history of this State then writing by said Doctor Williamson in New York.



Certified to the best of my recollection and belief, this 3d. day of September 1800 by

J. McK. Alexander

Mecklenburg County N. C.

In 1819 the completed draught was first published; but the certificate was not then published; nor was the incomplete first draught then published, although it was mentioned. Although both draughts were written after the fire in 1800, as that fact was not mentioned it was supposed that the narrative was copied from the records and book and that it was a copy of the genuine Declaration.

But as it was written after the fire in 1800 North Carolina has been proudly boasting of a Declaration of Independence written in 1800.

A comparison of the skeleton resolves in the above with the Resolves of May 31st, 1775, published in the newspapers of New Bern, Wilmington and Charleston in June, 1775, shows an agreement and corresponding sequence of subject matter that indicates that Col. Alexander had the Resolves of May 31 in mind and sought to reproduce them. Further; on reading the first and second sentences of his statement, it is evident that he was inadvertent as to dates.

Apparently he started out to say that the election was held on the 19th. Then he says that the men chosen at the election met at Charlotte on the 19th. There was some confusion of ideas. That the new committee was in session on May 31 admits of no question, for their published proceedings read:

"Charlotte Town, Mecklenburg County May 31

"This Day the Committee met, and passed the following RESOLVES.—"

(Here follows the genuine Declaration of Independence.)

"Signed by Order of the Committee

————— Eph. Brevard

Note.—See copy of the North Carolina Gazette (printed at New Bern,) June 16, 1775, in the Hall of History.

Note 2.—As Col. Alexander was writing in the year 1800, at two places in the above he began to write 1800: in the first place he wrote "May 20 180" and in the other, he wrote "May 19 18," and then he corrected himself, changing the year in each case to "1775."

In view of the fact that the foregoing statement, written by Col. Alexander in 1800, is the first draft of the Declaration of May 20, 1775, and of the further fact that the only official record of action taken in Mecklenburg County is the document of May 31, 1775, we, the undersigned, respectfully memorialize the General Assembly of North Carolina and petition that it change the date on the Flag and the Great Seal of the State from May 20, 1775, to May 31, 1775.

A mistake should be corrected when known and should not be persisted in.

S. A. ASHE,
STEPHEN B. WEEKS.

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